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## Timeline of Developments in Academic Dress in North America

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## **Timeline of Developments in Academic Dress in North America**

***compiled by Stephen L. Wolgast***

The beginnings of academic dress in United States predate its founding, when in the colonial era the first colleges were established in North America. This timeline is a collection of dates and facts identifying the earliest use of cap and gown, and early departures from its English antecedents (before 1895) and from the Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume (after 1895).

Investigation into American traditions is only just beginning. As more researchers visit more archives, they will find material that establishes earlier firsts and discover new departures. In short, this timeline should be considered a starting point rather than a definitive conclusion.

- 1635**      **COLLÈGE DES JÉSUITES** North America's first college is founded in Quebec.
- 1636**      **HARVARD** Founded as New College on 9 June, it would become the oldest college in the US.
- 1655**      **HARVARD** College law requires students to wear coat, gown or cloak; 'gown' may have referred to a 'night gown', the modern term for which is dressing gown (in US usage) and which was worn outdoors at the time during warm weather in lieu of a woollen coat.
- 1692**      **HARVARD** The college laws, now in Latin, forbid any student from leaving campus without 'Toga, Tunica, vel Penula ...' (gown, coat, or hood/cloak). Mourning gowns were popular at the time, as was the 'night gown', an outer garment men wore in public in hot weather.
- 1701**      **YALE** Founded on 9 Oct., it was originally called the Collegiate School.
- 1740**      **UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA** Founded as the Charity School, it becomes a college in 1749 and is renamed the Academy of Philadelphia.
- 1746**      **PRINCETON** Founded on 22 Oct., it was named the College of New Jersey.
- 1754**      **COLUMBIA** Founded on 31 Oct., it was named King's College.
- 1755**      **PRINCETON** Statutes require all students except freshmen to wear gowns. The rule is rescinded in 1758.
- 1760**      **COLUMBIA** Candidates for the bachelor's degree wear gowns without caps to commencement.
- 1763**      **COLUMBIA** Students must wear 'a proper academical habit' or face fines of 2 shillings if caught without a gown.

- 1764 **BROWN** Founded on 3 March, it was named the College of Rhode Island.
- 1768 **PRINCETON** All officers and students must wear black gown and square cap. Penalty for disobedience is 5 shillings.
- 1769 **DARTMOUTH** College is founded on 13 Dec.
- 1773 **YALE** Faculty and upper-classmen wear gowns.
- 1776–81 American Revolutionary War. Many colleges close for the duration of the war.
- 1784 **COLUMBIA** Reorganized after the Revolution, Columbia no longer requires gowns.
- 1786 **BROWN** Black gowns and caps are adopted for commencement.
- 1787 **COLUMBIA** Students request that gowns be re-authorized, but the trustees recommend gowns only for the president and professors.
- 1788 **COLUMBIA** Trustees accede to students' wishes and re-authorize gowns for all.
- 1789 **COLUMBIA** Statute permits the president and professors to require gowns of students and faculty at appropriate events.  
**KING'S COLLEGE, Nova Scotia** Founded by a former governor of King's College in New York, its original location was Windsor,
- 1802 **PRINCETON** College law requires students to own and wear 'the regulation cap and gown' at prayers, church, and all public exercises.
- 1807 **HARVARD** Rule permits a black gown among commencement day dress.  
**KING'S COLLEGE, Nova Scotia** Rules require academic dress, 'Habits to be the same as worn in Oxford ...'
- 1813 **PENNSYLVANIA** Rule makes black gowns official.
- 1827 **COLUMBIA** Students ask the trustees to adopt a rule of their own regulating caps; the trustees pass the request to the faculty instead of acting.
- 1842 **DALHOUSIE** Regulation requires students to wear the undergraduate gown of King's College, Nova Scotia.
- 1842 **TORONTO** Ceremonial Committee directed to provide gowns for various officials attending the ceremony that opened the college.
- 1843 **MCGILL** Trustees adopt statute on academic dress, which is to be the same as Oxford's with four exceptions: the undergraduate commoners' gown is that of the Oxford scholar's gown; the scholar wears the undergraduate commoners' gown of King's College Toronto; students in law and medicine wear the Cambridge BA gown, and medical students wear 'a plain rose coloured silk hood'.
- 1844 **TORONTO** Medical students to wear the gowns of the arts faculty, the details of which were unrecorded.
- c. 1850 **DARTMOUTH** Some students wear the cap and gown.
- 1852 **COLUMBIA** Trustees remind the faculty that professors and students must wear gowns to examinations.
- 1853 **TORONTO** Students and professors wear gowns to examinations.
- 1854 **HARVARD** At commencement, the marshal and speakers wear cap and gown.
- 1859 **PRINCETON** The college president wears a gown at commencement.
- 1861–65 US Civil War. The use of academic dress is in decline.

- 1866** **DALHOUSIE** Students are required to wear gowns to lectures and to and from campus.
- 1868** **SEWANEE (UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH)** Having been founded in 1857, it opens for classes after delays caused by the Civil War.
- 1871** **SEWANEE** Trustees approve royal purple robe for chancellor and crimson gown for vice-chancellor.
- 1872** **SEWANEE** Trustees approve colours for graduates' hoods. For gowns they adopt Oxford patterns, specifying that gown trim was to match the trim of the corresponding hood.
- 1874** **PRINCETON** Students are required to 'wear the gown in all public speaking connected with the college'.
- 1880** **DALHOUSIE** Three students are fined twenty-five cents for appearing at exams without their gowns. The fines were levied again in 1882 and 1883.
- 1883** **DALHOUSIE** Senate votes in favour of abolishing academic dress.
- 1886** **HARVARD** The University faculty wears gowns to the 250th anniversary.
- 1887** **22 April PENNSYLVANIA** Approves special academic dress after students have begun wearing their own. The new gowns are worn without hoods; for graduates, the yoke of the gown is in the faculty colour. Undergraduates wear gowns in all black, with a silk cord in the faculty colour 'along the margin of the yoke'.
- 5 December COLUMBIA** Trustees approve its first scheme of academic dress, which includes a festal scarlet robe for doctors, and for doctors and masters a gown with three velvet stripes on the sleeves.
- 1890** **HARVARD** Caps and gowns are required for attendance at chapel on Baccalaureate Sunday.
- 1891** **NEW YORK UNIVERSITY** Rule authorizes gowns, hoods, and caps, 'the pattern suggested being those of Edinburgh'. They are not required to be worn.
- SYRACUSE** Students are denied permission to wear cap and gown.
- PRINCETON** Seniors adopt black gown 'with a narrow strip of orange between the shoulders'.
- 1892** **DARTMOUTH** The Class of 1892 votes in favour of wearing caps and gowns during commencement week and at commencement.
- YALE** Seniors adopt academic dress for commencement.
- NEW YORK UNIVERSITY** Description of its costume includes master's gown 'to be faced down the front with black velvet with bars of the same across the sleeves'.
- JOHNS HOPKINS** Bachelors and doctors adopt black gowns; masters not mentioned.
- 1893** **Spring HAMPDEN-SYDNEY** Grey gowns adopted for commencement.
- June PRINCETON** John J. McCook gets permission from his fellow trustees to discuss standardizing academic dress with representatives of Harvard, Yale, Columbia, and other universities.
- December** Gardner Cotrell Leonard publishes an article in *University Magazine* promoting his scheme for standardized academic dress.

- 1895** **CORNELL** Seniors vote to adopt academic dress for commencement.  
**May INTERCOLLEGIATE CODE** Representatives of Princeton, Yale, New York, and Columbia meet at Columbia to create the Intercollegiate Code of Academic Costume. Leonard attends as a technical advisor.
- 1896** **YALE** Students in the final year of the LLB choose to wear academic dress on Sundays.
- 1897** **DALHOUSIE** At students' request, Senate requires academic dress again.
- 1898** **DALHOUSIE** Regulations now state that students are no longer 'required' to wear academic dress but are 'entitled' to it.
- 1900** **NEW YORK UNIVERSITY** All graduates wear academic dress to commencement for the first time.
- 1901** **MCGILL** Professors, lecturers, and students are required to wear academic dress to lectures.
- 1902** **8 December HARVARD** The university adopts the Code, but with crow's feet in the faculty colour on the facings of all gowns; hoods are of the Edinburgh simple shape lined crimson but with no faculty colour trim.  
**PRINCETON** University President Woodrow Wilson reminds faculty of the requirement to wear academic dress at any public function at which the faculty appears as a body.
- 1903** **MCGILL** The calendar of 1903-04 includes list of gowns and hoods for its ten degrees, which are to follow Cambridge patterns, a switch from the Oxford patterns adopted in 1853. The hood for medical students is omitted; the MD wears a scarlet cloth hood lined with yellow silk.
- 1907** **STANFORD** Students wear academic dress to commencement.
- 1912** **BROWN** In a first for the Ivy League, it changes the colour of its academic dress from the Code's directions when the mortar-boards worn by its corporate administration switch from black to the university colour, seal brown, in velvet.
- 1922-23** **TORONTO** Hood shapes and colours reviewed and proposed for all degrees.
- 1932** **ICC** Revisions are made to the Code: the master's hood is shortened to its current length; additional faculty colours are authorized; chevrons are called for when hood linings display more than one colour.
- 1933** **COLUMBIA** University President Nicholas Butler considers adding embroidered crowns to its academic gowns, but abandons the plan.
- 1938** **YALE** Trustees authorize coloured gowns, of Yale blue, for doctors and masters. Yale becomes the first Ivy League university to permit graduates to wear coloured academic dress since the Code was adopted.
- 1939** **MCGILL** The calendar of 1939-40 includes list of gowns and hoods for its twenty-three degrees. The MD hood, still of scarlet cloth, is now lined with dark blue silk.
- 1945** **MCGILL** The governor's gown, in use for at least several years, is described in a letter as dark blue with darker velvet bands (no colour or further description is mentioned). It is worn by those members of the Board of Governors who do not hold degrees.

- 1948** **COLUMBIA** Administrators prepare a scheme of special dress for its officers. Voted down because the cost is too high.
- 1950** **SYRACUSE** At the chancellor's request, the University adopts orange gowns of various shapes for the chancellor, trustees, and other officers.
- 1954** **ROCHESTER** The University adopts a red gown for its president and black gown with gold trim for some of its officers.
- 1955** **HARVARD** Doctors of Philosophy are granted crimson gowns. (Later, all doctors will be permitted to wear the special gown.)
- 1956** **ICC** The chevron becomes permissive instead of obligatory in hood linings of more than one colour.
- Late 1950s** **TORONTO** A doctoral gown of the Oxford shape is adopted, in black silk with facings and the lower sleeves covered in scarlet broadcloth; the facings are edged in white cord. It is worn with a mortar-board with a red tassel.
- 1958** **COLUMBIA** A second scheme of special dress is prepared. (It is unknown why it was not approved.)
- 1959** **PRINCETON** Trustees approve PhD gowns of black with orange facings, sleeve linings, and sleeve bars. The pattern of the gown and doctor's hood depart from the Code. The sleeves of the gown are lined and bound about an inch on the outside of the cuff in orange and the stripes sit lower on the sleeves; the hood is uniformly edged with orange rather than a faculty colour.
- ICC Revisions to the Code include: the arm slit on the master's gown moves to the wrist; additional faculty colours are authorized; faculty colours are assigned by subject studied; women are permitted a soft square cap; the master's and doctor's gowns are permitted to be worn closed; the cut-out in the master's sleeves is to be on the front (heretofore its location was unspecified). Tassels in faculty colours are permitted. The changes take effect in 1960.
- 1960** **PRINCETON** Marshals first wear orange gown with black facings and sleeve bars at convocation honouring Konrad Adenauer.
- 1961** **ICC** Committee on Academic Costume and Ceremony adopts maroon as faculty colour for home economics. The addition never appears in the ACE book.
- 1963** **COLUMBIA** The Trustees approve slate grey gowns for all its graduates, with two embroidered crowns on each gown. It replaces the hood with a cape (without cowl) for bachelors and doctors, and with an unusual shape for masters, which alone among the 'hoods' loses the white chevron.
- 1964** **10 May PENNSYLVANIA** The Trustees approve a unique gown for the PhD in red with blue cuffs and dark blue sleeve bars and facings. (Later, all doctors will be permitted to wear this gown, with the trim in faculty colour.) The president and other officers also wear the gown.
- BROWN** For its bicentennial commemoration, the University creates a special presidential gown. It is seal brown and trimmed with gold sleeve bars and a red yoke.
- 1966** **COLUMBIA** The London Doctor of Music gown with matching hood and a Tudor bonnet becomes the mace bearer's costume. In the future a pileus cap replaces the bonnet.

- 1968** **BROWN** The University creates special gowns for doctors and masters in seal brown with the university shield of arms outlined in red on both sides of the front panels.
- 1973** **ICC** Revisions introduce for the associate's degree a 'flat shield hood' (i.e. cape); for six-year master's degrees, hoods with four inches of edging; for commerce, accountancy, and business, an alternative faculty colour (sapphire blue). It adds a contradiction when it specifies the faculty colours are determined by subject studied (in the costume code) and by the faculty conferring the degree (in the ceremony guide). It permits an interdisciplinary doctorate to adopt the colour of the principal subject studied. It also points out they the Code's descriptions are not 'hard-and-fast regulations'.
- 1977** **STANFORD** In a significant departure from the Code, Stanford introduces red and black doctoral gowns that combine elements of Cambridge and Oxford doctoral dress robes.
- c. 1985–89** **COLUMBIA** The University changes the colour of its gowns to Columbia grey, which has some blue in it. Faculty members begin buying hoods of the Code shape instead of the official but unpopular Columbia shapes.
- 1986** **ICC** The colour for the PhD is revised to be dark blue regardless of the field of study; for all other degrees the colour refers to the subject instead of the degree title. Other revisions remove several items: soft square caps for women; light blue gowns for an associate's degree in education; the alternative colour (sapphire blue) for commerce, accountancy, and business; the special gown for chief marshals. The changes are published in 1987.
- 1993** **PRINCETON** The University authorizes PhD gowns that follow the Code, while keeping its unique gown as an option.
- 2000** **COLUMBIA** The University authorizes Code-shaped hoods. Doctors' sleeve bars are required to be black (instead of either black or the faculty colour). The president's gown gets a fourth stripe.
- 2004** **UNIVERSITY OF TRINITY COLLEGE, TORONTO** The student union endorses the continued wearing of academic dress in the dining hall.
- COLUMBIA** At its 250th anniversary, bachelors' and masters' gowns substitute a special tab that is enlarged to include the anniversary logo for the crown tab. The gowns change to a lighter shade of blue. The crown returns in 2005, but the enlarged tab remains.
- 2005** **VANDERBILT** Creates a PhD gown with sleeves turned back at the elbows, held with cords, lined in dark blue. The gown is black with yellow facings and a yellow 'V' on the left side of the yoke at the front.
- 2008** **COLUMBIA** Publishes pre-1932 statute on academic dress, officially prohibiting its coloured gowns and crown trimming. The statute is ignored. In 2010 it alters the published statute by including slate grey gowns, but continues to overlook its crowns.